

Jane Clement Jones



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BY THE REV. N. BURWASH, S.T.D., L.L.D.

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THE early years of this century still witnessed the movement of population from the United States to Upper Canada. A few years before the great Loyalist movement had broken in upon the solitude of our primæval forests and had proved that underneath their dark shadows there lay concealed a soil rich in all the resources of a prosperous people. And so for nearly half a century a portion of the stream of young enterprise and ability which was flowing from the rocky hillsides of New England, found its way to our Canadian shores. It would scarcely be fair to think or speak of these early settlers as foreigners or immi-

grants. They, or their fathers, were born under our British flag; they spoke our language; they were familiar with all the ways of our new country. They were often the old neighbours, sometimes the blood-relations, of the Loyalist founders of Upper Canada, and when they came among us they were at once at home—loyal citizens of the young land and loyal subjects of its King.

Among these incomers, in the year 1811, was a young harness-maker named Clement, from the village of Goffstown, in New Hampshire. There was at that time, tradition says, no one of his trade between Montreal and Kingston, and when he built his little backwoods home, at what is now the town of Brockville, he soon obtained a contract from the Government to refit the cavalry, who then were continually moving from east to west—along the shores of the St. Lawrence and the lakes. Here, in the November of that year, he planted his wife, Elizabeth Bancroft, and two little daughters, Phœbe and Elizabeth.

In the course of years the little group grew to seven, Lucy, Martha, Sarah, Jane, and George being born in the Canadian home, on the banks of the beautiful St. Lawrence. Here, by the beginning of the thirties, the two elder daughters, Phœbe and Elizabeth, were married, the first to young Billa Flint, the son of the prosperous merchant of the same name, the second to Rufus Holden, then a young man in mercantile life, and afterwards for long years a prominent citizen and physician of the city of Belleville. Shortly after, in the second cholera year, 1834, the father, who was evidently a man of ability, entrusted by the Canadian Government with important commissions, and who has left behind him a record as a friend of the poor, the sick and the afflicted, was suddenly taken from his household by the fatal epidemic.

The name of the mother, Elizabeth Bancroft, contains a history in itself. We meet it in places of influence far back in English history. In New England it stands on the earliest

rolls of the colony, and holds a proud place in American history, for the large number of the name distinguished in literature and in public life. It carries with it many of the best intellectual and religious traditions both of Old England and of New England. Certain it is that Elizabeth Bancroft was not unworthy of her name, and handed down to her children, both in natural endowments and in careful Christian training, those noble traits which have distinguished both the family and the race to which they belonged.

Already, in 1834, they had become connected with Methodism, which, in those early days, gathered to itself through its devoted pioneers all the earnest religious spirits of the land, except those attached to the two established Churches in the centres of population. The Flints, father and son, were both prominent and active Methodists, and it is not yet a year since the son, the Hon. Senator Flint, passed to his rest, in Belleville, at the ripe age of

eighty-nine, after more than fifty years of active toil in Sabbath-school, temperance, and general church work. The Holdens were also a family widely influential and honoured, both in the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches.

Thus from the very beginning this family became linked with the best elements of our young Canadian life in religion, in commerce, and in public affairs; and when, in 1834, Mrs. Clement was left a widow, she was not without attached and influential friends. In the same year she removed to Belleville, where her son-in-law, Mr. Flint, was now established in business; and from this date her descendants were identified with all that is most important in the history of this city. Here she was again called to drink the cup of sorrow in the sudden death of her only son, and of a loved daughter. And here, in after years, she was permitted to see all her remaining children settled about her in beautiful, prosperous and happy homes. And here, in 1851, sur-

rounded by her children, she died in peace in a good old age.

It is out of such a family history as this that we are introduced to Jane Clement Jones, the youngest surviving member of the household. We first meet her as the bright, happy, beautiful child, full of the energy and spirits of youth, enjoying all life to the full. There comes to us, out of the tradition of childhood, a picture of the playhouse of the children in the shadow of the great rocks, under the overhanging vines, close by the gliding stream of the great St. Lawrence. In such a home as this was imagination quickened and the capacity for the purest enjoyments of life called out in full strength. Another picture sits before us—the round, merry face of the happy child, with basket in hand, tripping her way to the cabin of some poor or sick neighbour with the good things provided by father's and mother's kindness. Nor must we forget the other picture, which fills with beauty the simple furnishings of every Puritan home, of the

old Bible, the family altar, the blazing fireside, the sweet songs of Zion, mother's teaching, and the sunny quiet of the chamber where she prayed for and with the children till their hearts were melted into penitence by her tears.

But there were other tearful pictures as well in this young life. In a few short hours the father so kind and loved was stricken with the plague, died and was hurried away to the grave by the trembling neighbours. With almost equal suddenness, if not with equal terror, sister Sarah was taken by the rupture of a blood-vessel, and finally the only little brother she had ever known was carried home from the cold, dark waters of the river, drowned.

It is easy to follow the results of all this on the sensitive, emotional spirit of the child. The unseen world came very near. The conviction of sin under the stern old Puritan teaching was deep and lasting. At ten years of age, just after her father's death, the decision

of life appears to have been fully made in a revival which at that time touched the Sunday-school and gathered in many of the children; after earnest, prayerful seeking she found the peace of God. With the example before them of this one of the noblest Christian lives of our time thus laying its deep foundations of repentance and faith in early childhood, let no one presume to question the reality of childhood piety. But let us lay, as here, the old foundations of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, not trusting to some shadowy modern conception of a universal regeneration.

But with this healthful, moral and religious development there was also the furnishing of education such as the facilities of that day afforded. The elementary schools of the thirties did not offer a very extensive curriculum, and all they could give was soon mastered by a bright young mind; and as yet but few higher schools had been planted in our country, and to these

the young ladies were not admitted. But Methodism, both in its laity and ministry, had already appreciated the importance of this problem. The resolution had been taken as early as 1830 to found an academy for the liberal education of the youth of both sexes. After some six years of heroic effort the work was accomplished, and for the next six years the young men and the young women of our best Canadian Methodist families were found in Upper Canada Academy, pursuing studies which would fit them for lives of wider usefulness. Here we next find Jane Clement laying the foundations which enabled her to be the leader and teacher of hundreds of men and women in after days. Very speedily, indeed, did she enter on the employment of her talents, for already at sixteen we find her teaching in the Sabbath-school, a place maintained for fifty years until the last long affliction shut her out from work.

But we have been studying these early years of life as the training-

school for her subsequent eminently useful career. Not least important among the influences of this period was her close contact with the active business of life. When left alone with her one child her mother found her home with her elder daughter, Mrs. Flint. Mr. Flint was a practical, energetic and eminently successful merchant. Then other sisters, Mrs. Holden, Mrs. Holton, Mrs. Harrison, were all married to young men in Mr. Flint's employ, and who, a little later, founded successful business places of their own. The growing, active young woman was in daily contact with the plans and cares, the difficulties and the success of business, and with the strong, practical genius of her people, drank in its spirit and was familiar with its lessons. In 1847, she linked her life with another of Mr. Flint's assistants, Mr. Nathan Jones, and together they started to push the fortunes of life.

We have often had reason to admire the results of the "business colleges of those olden days." A

Flint in Belleville, a Jackson in Hamilton, a Ferrier in Montreal, were typical examples. Their young men were not mere paid underlings or servants. They were rather as younger brothers, or as sons with their father, rendering due reverence and faithful and obedient work, but with nothing of the degradation of servitude. They were members of one household, they worshipped around one family altar. They had common thoughts and ambitions. The younger was impressed by the character of the elder and learned all his methods of business. It was both the ambition and the advantage of the senior to set his boys up for themselves as soon as they had proved their capacity, in branches and extensions of his business.

So was it here, and Belleville has on its roll of successful citizens, who through a long life built up the commercial strength of the Bay City and its back country, no more honoured and successful names than those of Billa Flint and his brothers-in-law. Not last among these noble

men was Nathan Jones, and not least among the elements which from the outset contributed to his success, were the splendid talents of his young wife. No one could select the most attractive goods for the season's trade as could she; and no one could find just what each lady customer required, whether she were the dashing belle of twenty from the town, or the elderly lady of sixty from the farm, as could she. With keen, sympathetic insight she seemed to understand everything; and the spare hours which at their first start in life she gave to helping her husband in his business, were worth more to him than thousands of capital. They grew and prospered rapidly, and soon built the beautiful Bridge Street home which many of us remember for nearly forty years past. Her little family, too, began now to engross her time and strength, and other fields of consecrated work began to open before her, but still for long years her husband enjoyed and prized her company and counsel in the purchase of stock for the

ladies' department of his now extensive business. If she shared his wealth she had the proud satisfaction of knowing she had shared the toil by which it was made.

But we now approach a point from which her talents were to find a wider field and accomplish rarely successful work for God and for His Church. In the winter of 1855-6 the Rev. James Caughey visited Belleville, and for several months conducted services in the Pinnacle Street church, the Rev. John Carroll being the superintendent of the circuit. Our older people will well remember the character of the work of this man of God in various parts of our country. It was not merely a large ingathering of the young and the undecided, or the openly ungodly, into the church, though some five hundred of these were added to the membership of our own and other churches. But it was a work which lifted the leaders in the church to a higher plane of Christian life.

For fifteen or twenty years, under

the labours of Caughey and the Palmers, the doctrine of entire sanctification was very familiar to our Canadian Methodism. We will not claim that the form of teaching and preaching this doctrine was beyond criticism. Perhaps it made too much of the instantaneous work. Perhaps it tended to undue subjectivity in religion, turned the thoughts too much within and too little to the calls to work without. Perhaps, in its call to work it looked more at the spiritual than at the temporal needs of humanity. Perhaps it exalted simple faith above works, beyond the measure of St. James. But it certainly did this: It aroused the conscience of the Church to a sense of the sin of lukewarmness. It called true followers of Christ up to a far higher consecration and a more earnest perfect Christian life than they had ever attempted before. It brought a baptism of power, of living present joy and peace, of abiding indwelling of the Spirit, unknown before; and certainly John Wesley would have rejoiced over it with great joy.

Mrs. Jones was now thirty years of age, rich in rare gifts temporal and spiritual, physical, intellectual and social, and all were now and forever consecrated to the Master's service, and for forty years her fidelity to that consecration never weakened. During the last five years the consecration was that of the patient sufferer, but for thirty-five it was that of work, amazing in its abundant labours, its energetic zeal, and its triumphant faith. It was this active consecration to work which saved her from that mere subjectivity which has marred the Christian perfection of so many good men, and which in our day has fallen into fanaticism, bringing reproach upon the very name of holiness.

Nor was that work the mere pursuit of hobbies. She had heart and hand for everything that was good. She was faithful to her share in all the activities, agencies and means of grace of the Church. Her pastor could always depend on her for prayer-meeting, class-meeting, love-

feast, special service or public worship. Home was not neglected, but time must be found and was found in a wonderful way for every part of the work of God. It was a matter of conscience. "I would feel guilty if I did not go," she would say in her cheery yet serious way. Yet God had given her some special gifts; these she understood, and around them she consecrated and concentrated her special energies. In these she excelled, and anticipated by many years some of the most important achievements of the Church of to-day.

The three fields which now specially opened up before her were: 1. The class-meeting. 2. The organization of young men for Bible study, self-improvement and Christian work. 3. The care of the sick and the poor. We can give but an outline of what she accomplished in each of these important departments.

Her class-books, which she carefully preserved, date from 1857, so that at the time of her death she had

been a class-leader for nearly thirty-eight years. She began with a class of seventeen and an average attendance of six or seven. In a short time the membership increased to thirty, and ultimately to as many as fifty young ladies. These young women came from all classes of society. Rich and poor literally met together and their leader was the common link that bound them in one.

During these years the class-meeting was frequently on its trial. Discussions arose in the Church again and again which compelled it to vindicate its place in the constitution of the Church by its inherent usefulness, and in few places was that vindication more satisfactory than in the town of Belleville, and in such a class as that of Mrs. Jones. I have before me twelve class-books, each covering a period of about three years, all carefully marked for attendance each week, not merely as present or absent, but as distant or sick, showing that each week she made it a point to know just where

each member of this large class was, and the cause of absence when absent. The former pastors of Belleville know well, too, how carefully this accurate bookkeeping was followed up by personal visitation, so that we doubt whether she ever lost a member except where, through some unfortunate influence, there was a wilful determination to give up the Christian life. Those committed to her care did not easily slip away from her. This, of course, implied great watchfulness for souls. Few leaders kept such perfect trace of the spiritual advancement of each individual member from month to month, as she. Each one seemed to lie as a burden on her soul. If any were in danger or difficulty they were always the subject of special prayer. When she felt that the safety of any one of her charge needed special effort she called for the help of the pastor, although few of us felt that we could be successful when she failed.

The intelligent conduct of the class-meeting was with her a matter

of special study. Dealing with young people whose experience of the things of God was limited, and many of whom were as yet but in the rudiments of Christian life, it became her special concern to develop a more complete Christianity. As a foundation for this she aimed first of all to bring each one out to the clear, abiding witness of the Spirit. She never felt that one of her charge was safe until they were sure of sins forgiven. Next to this she inculcated high ideals of Christian duty and consecration. Holiness to the Lord was the motto of her own life, and the standard of life which she constantly and consistently held up before all her class. But in this she was very far from depending on mere emotion. The Word was her touchstone, and few possessed in more eminent degree the power to use the Word to enlarge and enrich the work of the class-meeting hour. While fond of music, and deeply appreciating the power of song in the social means, the precepts and promises of the

Word were her sheet-anchor, and her aim was to fashion and perfect both the inner faith and the outer life of her class by the rule of the Word.

The year 1869 marked the commencement of another of Mrs. Jones' distinctive fields of work. She had now been for twenty-eight years a Sabbath-school teacher and a careful Bible student. This experience led her to appreciate fully the importance of a link between the Sabbath-school and the Church, some agency by which the young men trained in the Sabbath-school might be held in touch with the school until they became fully established as members of the Church of Christ. In that year she was placed in charge of the senior Bible-class of boys, which henceforth became one of the most successful agencies of the Belleville church. She immediately estimated at full value the importance and the claims of the task before her. She felt that to hold these young men she must give them work worthy of keen, active,

educated young minds. Hence she laid the foundation of her success in careful, thorough, and high-class preparation. Her notes of preparation indicate Biblical scholarship of no mean order. Geography, history, antiquities, books of travel, all contributed their light on the section studied. She possessed that essential requisite of the successful exegete — the historical imagination. She converted brief annals into living pictures filled with real, moving, acting men, and out of these she taught the great lessons of morals and religion with such attractive power that in a short time her class was overflowing.

The situation in Belleville was peculiarly favourable to her work. Two large colleges, Albert and the Ontario Business College, brought young men from all parts of the Dominion and even from beyond the seas. In the course of fourteen years in this work seven hundred and seven young men passed through her class, which often consisted of more than one hundred members.

The gathering together of these young men was to her a golden opportunity. Her first thought was the conversion of each one. On the blank page of her roll of members is pasted this verse:

“ My class for Jesus ! nothing less
Can save, can sanctify, can bless,
All earth-born skill could I convey
’Twould perish in the judgment day.”

Of the result of her work in this respect we have no exact record, but the belief of some of the old members is that the great majority were led to Christ. Once they were clearly converted, her next effort was to develop and organize their powers of work along lines which would give character to their after life. They formed themselves into a mutual improvement class: “ The object the intellectual and moral improvement of those who unite therewith.” In the minute-book of this society we find that they collected a library, visited sick members, kept up a weekly programme of discussions and entertainments, organized

a temperance society, and organized a band to pray and work for the conversion of such of their class-mates as were not yet decided for Christ.

In addition to this work, which implied three meetings each week, one for prayer, one for Bible study and one of a literary and social character, a detachment of the class were always ready to assist Mrs. Jones in the cottage prayer-meetings among the poor of the city. Here was certainly the Epworth League in all its essential elements already in operation twenty-five years ago. It will surprise no one to learn that out of this work came eight or nine ministers of the Gospel, besides Sabbath-school teachers and workers beyond our power to number.

This work for young men was just fairly started when, in 1872, a terrible accident opened the door to a new field of work for Mrs. Jones. Through some mistake two trains collided a short distance east of Belleville, and in a moment cars filled with passengers were converted into a mass of mangled and

scalded suffering. The wounded and dying were brought to Belleville to be cared for. A building was extemporized for a hospital. The ladies of the city volunteered as nurses, and, with a unanimity which was her most emphatic testimonial, they turned to Mrs. Jones as their leader. The service of mercy was a protracted one, for it was many weeks before all could be removed to their own homes. But it brought to the ladies of Belleville the conviction that permanent provision must be made for the wounded, the sick, and the aged and infirm poor in their young city.

Movements of this kind advance slowly, but in 1879 a Woman's Christian Association was formed for the care of the poor and the building of a home and a hospital. It was organized upon the common basis of Christian charity, without distinction of race or creed. Its first president was Mrs. Jacques, who shortly after passed to her reward and Mrs. Jones took her place, and thus almost from its beginning was

the leader of the work. They began by visiting the gaol, where in the severe weather the poor found refuge with the criminals. Their hearts were at once drawn out toward these unfortunates, who for no crime but their poverty and age were driven to find their winter home surrounded by sin. They hired a little house. The furniture was begged from the members from house to house, Mrs. Jones conveying it in her own carriage to the new and humble institution.

Presently their quarters were too small for their work and a larger house was taken. Then the city council transferred to them the entire care of the aged and destitute of the city. This they willingly undertook, combining with it efforts for the salvation of unfortunate young women. In the next twenty years they reduced the expenses to the city of this work by at least one-half, while they far more than doubled its efficiency. For in the meantime they had conceived and carried by faith and prayer to a

successful issue a great city charity, an honour and an ornament to their town. They built on the shores of the beautiful Bay of Quinte a group of noble buildings in which the aged and the poor could be sheltered and cared for in comfort both to body and soul and surrounded by pure and holy influences, and in which the sick could be nursed back to health again.

The faith and effort needed to struggle through to the culmination of such a work can scarcely be realized. At one time their treasury was reduced to twenty-seven cents with fifteen people in their home to be fed, when an anonymous letter to Mrs. Jones brought ten dollars to their relief. She lived herself in an atmosphere of wondrous faith in God and in the sure success of His work, and she possessed the rare gift of inspiring others with a portion of her own gracious spirit. The Hospital and Home for the Friendless, in Belleville, are to-day an imperishable monument of her consecration to duty.

Our sketch of this eminent saint would be imperfect without a glimpse of that inner home-life in which the highest type of womanhood appears in its richest beauty and glory. The faithful, zealous class-leader, the leader and teacher of the young people, and the soul and life and head of large charitable enterprises, was at the same time the centre and soul of a remarkably happy home. Her husband was a man of remarkably quiet, even temperament, refined tastes, and excellent judgment, and the two were united in the tenderest affection. We have already noted the helpful spirit with which she began married life when fortune was still to be made. The memory of those early days of work together seems to have been treasured as a very sacred thing, only referred to once in a long time to most intimate friends. But in after years, when the children were grown up, we find husband and wife repeating the old trip to make purchases together in Montreal or holidays to the seaside, and the little records of those trips

are full of the most beautiful spirit of tender wedded love purified and perfected by the sweetest graces of religion. The story of all the little incidents of the way, of the little gifts of husband to wife and wife to husband, of the daily little remembrances of the children, and of the heightened pleasure which came to all their enjoyment of nature and art as they tasted their good things of life together, is told at fifty with the artless simplicity and sweetness of a honeymoon.

In their children also they were greatly blessed. The eldest son became the companion, almost the compeer, of his mother in varied work for the Master. They lived to see their daughters settled in life, united to Christian men of sterling character and ability and growing influence in the country, while to one fell the quiet but blessed portion of tenderly caring for father and mother in the declining years of weakness and suffering, until first one and then the other entered into the rest of God.

For the last four or five years the house which had in days past been bright with the prattle of children, or cheery with the merry voices of young people, or vocal with the sweet sounds of praise and prayer, for father and children were rarely gifted in lute and song and led the devotions of the house of God for many long years, the house thus the brightest with pure joys in all the city was hushed into the saddened quiet of suffering. First father and then mother were called to pass under the rod. The grace which in the toil of life had made them strong to labour now made them patient to suffer, until after some years in this twilight of life Nathan Jones passed to his rest at seventy-six, April 22nd, 1892, and Jane Clement Jones in great peace and child-like faith followed, January 4th, 1895. Their record is well worthy of the study and imitation of coming generations of Methodists.